

SOVIET POLICY IN EGYPT
THEODORE WALLACE TRIEBEL
1975

Thesis
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SOVIET POLICY IN EGYPT

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

Bilad Micr kheirha li gheirha

The Land of Egypt, its riches belong to others

Ancient Egyptian proverb

Aside from Egypt being the "cradle of civilization," its main attraction to foreign governments of early times was its prominent geographical location. It provided a major land-bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa. With this in mind, Napoleon Bonaparte landed 40,000 troops at Alexandria in 1798 in expectation of obtaining a base astride the eastern lifeline of the British Empire. Moscow also recognized Egypt's geostrategic location. In 1833 the then Russian Foreign Minister Giers declared that:

The proclaimed principle of Egypt for the Egyptians is a utopia. Egypt, because of its geographical location at the junction of three continents, holds a position of such political importance that its independence is impossible.¹

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased the country's geographical significance all the more. On the average, four ship transits per day were made through that waterway one year after opening, and by 1966 this figure had risen to 60. Although closed since the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967, when

¹Serquis Yakobson, "Russia and Africa," in Ivo J. Lederer, ed., Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective (New Haven, 1962), p. 457.

reopened in June 1975 it will again receive a heavy flow of ship traffic. The oil carrying supertankers constitute only some six percent of the world marine and at its present depth the Canal can accommodate most of the world's dry cargo ships.²

Egypt's strategic significance to major powers in the first half of the 20th century was primarily derived from the Canal, but in mid century new events forced a change of focus. The creation of an Israeli State in 1948 and the Soviet Union's arms deal with Egypt in 1955 brought new issues to the forefront which propelled Cairo to greater visibility and prominence in world affairs. Pure geographical importance declined, although location remained especially significant to the Soviet Navy--more on this in Section IV. With Israel came the Arab-Israeli conflict, in which among Arab states Egypt maintained a dominating role. Because the United States and the USSR took opposing sides in that struggle, it assumed the character of something more than a regional skirmish; it had, and still has, the potential to erupt into a catastrophic war. Along with Russian weapons came the Kremlin's desire for influence in, and ultimately

²The Egyptian government is now implementing a program that will rejuvenate the Canal Zone. Port Said and Suez city will be rebuilt and made tax-free ports. The Canal will be widened and deepened in two stages. The first, taking three years during which traffic will not be interrupted, will make the waterway navigable for ships of 150,000 tons. The second stage will enable ships up to 200,000 tons to pass through. See "What Clearing the Canal Means," Economist, February 2, 1974, p. 37; and "Arab Pride and Power," Newsweek, February 18, 1974, p. 45.

some control of, Egyptian affairs. The Western powers were concerned because Moscow made no secret of the fact that it not only wanted them excluded from Egypt, but it wanted them out of the entire Middle East region.

These two principal reasons for Egypt's international importance--the Arab-Israeli conflict and Soviet aims--have ancillary ramifications which cannot be ignored. First, oil must enter the picture because it is now tied to the Arab-Israeli conflict through its use as a political coercive force. Egypt is a member of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) and this gives Cairo a voice in the group's policy planning.³ Second, because of a high degree of interaction between Middle East states, Soviet actions toward Egypt and Cairo's responses necessarily have some finite impact on other countries in the area. Hence, Moscow's policies toward Egypt encompass more area and more peoples than just Egypt and its inhabitants.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the policies that Kremlin leaders pursued in their relations with Egypt during a 20 year period, 1955 to 1975. I consider how Moscow managed to penetrate Egypt, thus the Middle East; what mechanisms the Soviets used to project their presence into the region; and the returns they desired from involvement. A recurrent theme of the paper is that Marxist-Leninist theory

³The other members are Abu Dhabi, Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.

not only consistently laged major policy decisions made with respect to the Near East, but that Soviet ideology was often-times relegated to secondary importance when brought face to face with the Kremlin's Realpolitikers. In addition, it should be kept in mind that the Soviets have used policies proven successful in Egypt in their relations with other Arab countries; therefore, I suggest that a study of Soviet policy in Egypt gives one an insight to Soviet policy toward other "progressive" Arab states. Lastly, while this paper is a historical study, it is not meant to be simply a record of past events. It is meant to enable one to have an understanding of present events, and, to a certain extent, to provide one with some feel for the course that Soviet policy in Egypt might take in the near future.

II. A FOOTHOLD GAINED

Those who adhere to the "school of continuity" between Imperial Russia's and the Soviet Union's expansion policy have little trouble rationalizing the Soviet thrust into Egypt in 1955. After all, the USSR was only a new name for old Russia and in the historic subconscious of the Russian people there is deeply imbedded a concern with the Muslim Middle East. Islam became established in Central and Eastern Asia at various times after the Arab conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries. It was widespread in what are now the Azerbaijan, Uzbek, Tadzhik and Turkman SSRs by the end of the 9th century. Most of the Muslim khanates were conquered and annexed by Russia in the 16 century; the remaining Muslim peoples were incorporated into the Russian empire during the 18th and 19th centuries. Presently, some 30 million persons who can historically be regarded as Muslims, and whose culture is broadly speaking Islamic, live in the Soviet Union.⁴

Historical inertia for expansion to the south gathered momentum with the Tsar's desire for warm water ports and their conquests into the contiguous states of Turkey and Persia. The "Eastern Question" revolved around the fate of Constantinople, the Turkish Straits and the disposition of the

⁴George Schopflin, ed., The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (New York, 1970), p. 478.

Balkan territories of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. In the early 1780s Catherine the Great extended military assistance to rebellious Egyptians, exploiting an opportunity to threaten Constantinople and the Straits from the rear. By 1786, the Mamluks, a powerful "Guards" formation in Egypt, were a quarter Russian and the Russian Consul was defending the autonomous Mamluk Beys of Egypt against Turkish protests, stating that they were under the protection of the Russian Empress.⁵ Imperial Russia's last chance to move further south was lost in 1917 with Bolshevik renunciation of secret Imperial government compacts made with the Allied powers. Ironically, for Moscow this included British and French guarantees for Russian territorial gains of Constantinople, the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and both shores of the Bosphorus.⁶

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, Lenin, and his successor Stalin, were primarily intent on securing the internal security of the communist regime; however, World War II enabled the Soviets to show that traditional ambitions had not really abated. Pretentious Soviet-German conversations were held in Berlin in November 1940. A secret protocol was drawn up, but never signed, delineating spheres of influence. With Stalin's approval, Foreign Minister Molotov

⁵Lederer, p. 456.

⁶A. S. Klieman, Soviet Russia and the Middle East (Baltimore, 1970), p. 33.

wrote that the Soviet government was prepared to accept the protocol, "Provided that the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf is recognized as the center of the aspirations of the Soviet Union."⁷ Molotov's negotiations also stressed the need for naval mobility. He obtained German and Italian support for replacing the 1936 Montreux Convention. The Convention hindered the tactical flexibility of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet because it recognized Turkey's right to regulate warship traffic through the Straits in time of war. Henceforth, the Soviet Union was to have the right to unrestricted passage for its navy through the Straits, and at any time. It is interesting to note that Molotov's stipulations were not couched in Marxist terms, but were plainly power political demands. The parallels to Tsarist foreign policy are striking.

The July 1952 coup d'etat in Egypt led by a group of army officers removed King Farouk from power and established a military dictatorship. General Naguib was its nominal head, but power was vested with Lieutenant Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser, who in the spring of 1954 became Egypt's acknowledged Chief of State. The initial Soviet reaction to the new regime was a mixture of reserve and hostility. The Kremlin believed that the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) aided the revolutionaries in the coup. The American purpose was, in

⁷ Alvin Z. Rubinstein, ed., The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union (New York, 1972), p. 145.

Soviet eyes, to establish an Egyptian regime that would favor ties with Washington in place of receding British control. The Soviets maintained a general policy of denunciation of the new Egyptian rulers till the end of 1954.⁸ Even the Anglo-Egyptian agreement of July 1954, under which British troops were to be withdrawn from the Suez Canal, was looked at skeptically in Moscow. Again it was thought to be some type of American plot by which the United States would secure greater influence with Cairo, to be used to force Egypt into a regional defense pact hostile to the USSR. On August 8, 1954, Pravda stated that the agreement:

. . . does not guarantee Egyptian territorial integrity. . . . It threatens Egypt's peaceful coexistence with other countries. In concluding the agreement the Egyptian government is taking a dangerous step towards supporting American plans for a Middle East Command, which is a direct threat to the cause of peace in the Middle East.⁹

Of chief concern to the Kremlin at that time was the system of defense alliances that Secretary of State Dulles was encouraging. Although the United States used the term "containment" to portray its foreign policy vis à vis the USSR, to the Soviets it was "capitalistic encirclement." Security of the homeland was obviously of paramount importance to the communist leaders and any program they could initiate to forestall or obviate the "encirclement" of their country would

⁸ A. Yodfat, Arab Politics in the Soviet Mirror (New York, 1973), pp. 34-39.

⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

be implemented. The signing of the Baghdad Pact between Turkey and Iraq in February 1955 (later that year joined by Iran, Pakistan, and Great Britain) presented a new threat to the Soviet Union in the form of a Northern Tier of Western aligned states on its southern border. However, the price paid by the West for the dubious advantage of bringing a single Arab state, Iraq, into its alliance system proved exorbitant.

Formation of the Baghdad Pact created a community of interest between Egypt and the Soviet Union where none had existed before. Nasser, an ardent nationalist, vehemently denounced the alliance as further evidence of Western interference in Middle East affairs and as a violation of the Arab League.¹⁰ The Pact polarized the states of the region between Iraq, which had joined the Western sponsored alliance, and Egypt, which assumed leadership of the anti-Baghdad Arab nationalist forces. It also had the effect of thrusting Nasser into prominence as an outspoken leader of Arab states opposing Western "imperialism." Nasser now shared with the Soviet Union a set of common goals: to prevent other Arab states from joining the Baghdad Pact; to undermine Iraq's position as potential leader of a pro-Western group of Arab states; and to eliminate remaining Western dominance in the Arab world. And so, in 1955 when given the opportunity, Moscow acted, and it appeared as though Nikita Khrushchev remembered well what Lenin had earlier preached:

¹⁰William R. Polk, The United States and the Arab World (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 204-05.

The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and without fail, most thoroughly, carefully, attentively and skillfully using every, even the smallest, 'rift' among the enemies, every antagonism of interest among the bourgeoisie of the various countries . . . and also by taking advantage of every, even the smallest opportunity of gaining a mass ally, even though this ally be temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional.¹¹

The rift was present and the Soviet Union was soon to gain an ally, albeit unstable.

On April 16, 1955, just eight days after Khrushchev consolidated his leadership within the Kremlin, the Soviet Foreign Ministry issued a major policy statement. It maintained that the Soviet Union could not remain indifferent to the situation arising in the Near East brought on by the formation of Western oriented "blocks" and the establishment of United States military bases in the region. Portending action, the statement concluded with:

. . . upholding the cause of peace, the Soviet Government will defend the freedom and independence of the countries of the Near and Middle East and will oppose interference in their domestic affairs.¹²

This was the first time the Soviets showed a willingness to commit themselves to action in the Middle East on behalf of local governments. For Egypt, it signaled a shift from the antagonistic attitude Moscow had displayed toward the new

¹¹V. I. Lenin, "Left Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder (New York, 1940), p. 53.

¹²Kennett Love, Suez: The Twice Fought War (New York, 1969), p. 238.

regime since the 1952 coup. The statement implied that the Soviets would be willing to aid Cairo materially in its anti-Westernization program.

Besides the formation of the Baghdad Pact, two other events during this time period accelerated the establishment of friendly relations between Cairo and Moscow. In the first place, the Israelis made an extremely successful attack on fortified Egyptian positions in the Gaza Strip in February 1955 that was humiliating to the Egyptian Army. Nasser had yet to win the near universal public support he enjoyed after the 1956 Suez crises. He came to power with the blessing of the army and he depended on it for his power base. There was no doubt that he had to obtain weapons if he was to satisfy the Revolutionary Command Council and secure Egypt's borders, much less mount an offensive on Israel as he promised.¹³ Secondly, Nasser went to the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference in April and established himself as not just an Egyptian leader, but as an Arab leader. This was noted in Moscow, as was the fact that Nasser told Chou En-lai, Communist China's representative, that Egypt needed arms and the West was being unresponsive.

One of the general themes evolving from Bandung was that Third World countries should be neutral in their foreign

¹³The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), comprised of the inner core officers in the original Free Officers group, remained at the top of Egypt's power structure till 1956. After the Suez crisis, Nasser himself was able to pick men for key ministerial positions, thereby increasing his control of the government.

relations. That is, have no political leanings toward either the capitalist or communist "camps." Nasser soon translated that idea into Arab "positive neutralism," which affirmed a country's right to deal on any level with all powers, no matter what their political and ideological policies were.¹⁴

The stage was set for a Soviet-Egyptian understanding. Unable to purchase sizable quantities of weapons from the West unless he met "anti-Arab" demands, Nasser initiated a request to Moscow for assistance and he was not disappointed. The initial arms arrangement was announced in September 1955 and covered some \$250 million in credits.¹⁵ There was no doubt that the Soviets had adroitly capitalized on events of the time. Taking advantage of the "rift" resulting from the establishment of the Baghdad Pact, and with the use of military aid they had entered Egypt, hence penetrated the Middle East.

An added attraction of attempting to gain a special relationship with Egypt was that it was a large, populous country with a relatively powerful army and a recognized regional leader. Kremlin leaders probably felt that influence in Egypt could well translate into influence with other Arab states.

¹⁴Fayez A, Sayegh, The Dynamics of Neutralism in the Arab World (San Francisco, 1964), p. 184.

¹⁵Wynfred Joshua, Soviet Penetration into the Middle East (New York, 1971), p. 10.

In January 1956 the Soviets extended a loan to Cairo for approximately \$150 million at two and one-half percent interest to help launch its first five year plan calling for industrial expansion. In February the two countries announced an agreement whereby the Soviet Union would extend some \$2 million in credit to establish a nuclear physics laboratory in Cairo. Later in the year Nasser accepted the Soviet offer of aid to construct the Aswan High Dam, after the United States withdrew its offer to help finance the first stage. Thus, new ties were established. Russian (or East European) weapons, rubles, and technical assistance went to Cairo; diplomatic dialogue commenced in earnest; and Soviet writers and theorists began to re-evaluate Egypt's position vis à vis the Soviet system. Moscow had bypassed the Northern Tier to obtain a foothold in Egypt--the next step was to strengthen and justify its position.

Ideological Justification

Nikita S. Khrushchev demonstrated flexibility in adjusting Soviet doctrine to socioeconomic and political developments in the Third World. He began the formal ideological justification for Soviet Union-Third World ties at the 20th Party Congress held in February 1956. Khrushchev largely abandoned the concept of "capitalist encirclement" as it had been somewhat self-defeating as by implication it regarded the entire noncommunist world as hostile to the USSR. Instead, Khrushchev said that "a vast 'peace zone,' including both socialist and non-socialist peace-loving states . . . has

emerged in the world arena."¹⁶ This shift from Stalin's bipolar "two camp" thesis heralded a fundamental change in Soviet policy toward under developed countries. Egypt was one of the states mentioned which had recently won its independence and was in the "peace zone." The Communist leader further stated that these countries "need not go begging for up-to-date equipment to their former oppressors. They can get it in the Socialist countries, without assuming any political or military commitments."¹⁷ Khrushchev also upheld the contention that there was more than one road a nation could take to realize socialism and he reaffirmed Lenin's position on peaceful coexistence.¹⁸ In effect, the Kremlin was officially announcing its intention to become directly involved in the affairs of Third World countries where it might be able to capitalize on anti-colonial sentiments, internal instabilities, or strained external relations.

¹⁶Leo Gruliov, ed., Current Soviet Policies II, The Documentary Record of the 20th Party Congress and Its Aftermath (New York, 1957), p. 33.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁸In 1959 Khrushchev elucidated the meaning of peaceful coexistence: "Peaceful coexistence is a continuation of the conflict between two social systems, but by peaceful means without war. We consider this an economic, political, and ideological struggle but not a military one." This definition of peaceful coexistence has not yet been refuted by Soviet leaders. V. D. Sokolovsky, ed., Military Strategy (New York, 1963), p. 171.

In 1957 a thorough Soviet reappraisal was made of Egypt's 1952 "revolution" (it was no longer a military coup). In revising the earlier line, the revolution was now said to have enjoyed strong popular support. The Egyptian Army had been solidly against the old government, the broad masses were on the side of the army and had taken part in the July rising. Most of the Egyptian officers had come from petty-bourgeois circles, received low pay, and were linked by family ties with the common people. This volte face, coming shortly after the 1956 Suez Crisis, simply acknowledged the fact that the Soviets approved of Nasser's regime, while at the same time it made the regime more palatable to Politburo members.

While a practical policy towards the Third World had evolved by 1955-56, it took until 1960-61 for theory to be fully wedded to the new reality. Khrushchev then instituted the ideological innovations which modernized Marxist-Leninist thought on developing areas so as to justify governmental economic assistance to noncommunist countries. This ideological justification came through support for the concept of "national democracy," first advanced by the 1960 Moscow Declaration of 81 Communist Parties, and adopted at the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961. "National democratic states" referred to those countries which adhered to anti-Western foreign policies and pursued domestic programs aimed at building socialism through a "non-capitalist path of development." This new approach also sanctioned communist cooperation with peasants and petty bourgeoisie in moving from

colonial dependency to socialism, without first moving through the stage of capitalist revolution. Egypt was considered to be a "national democratic state."¹⁹ If any of these states were involved in war, internal or external, receiving Kremlin approval, the action was categorized as a "national liberation movement." Moscow maintained that since such movements were caused by Western imperialism, they naturally merited Soviet assistance.° Although "general" and "local" war was to be avoided (they could lead to nuclear holocaust), in January 1961 Khrushchev said that:

There will be wars of liberation as long as imperialism exists, as long as colonialism exists. They are revolutionary wars. Such wars are not only permissible but inevitable. . . . What would our attitude be to such uprisings? It would be most favorable.²⁰

The ideological framework that was erected so "fraternal" ties could be selectively made with Third World countries was thus completed.

¹⁹B. Ponomarev, "Concerning the National Democratic State," International Affairs, (Moscow), No. 8 (May 1961), pp. 41-42.

²⁰Quoted in Brian Crozier, The Struggle for the Third World (London, 1966), p. 23.

III. NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS

Despite temporary setbacks, the Soviet Union conducted its policy in Egypt with a rational calculation of possible gains over possible costs and with a deftness that led to Cairo's military dependence on the Kremlin. Because Nasser was not a communist, the Soviets did not really expect a political coup in Egypt, rather, they were interested in reducing Western power with a commensurate gain in Soviet power. Soviet support for Egypt's progressive (anti-West) foreign policy was paralleled by approval, though much less enthusiastic, of its internal policy, ignoring such disagreeable aspects as the outlawing of the communist party and persecution of local communists. These ideological issues were not forgotten, but were considered of secondary importance, not worth the risk of dissolving a new, profitable relationship.

It was the Arab-Israeli conflict that proved to be the vehicle that the Soviets rode to continue making inroads into the area. Because Moscow had no control over the regional wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973, it did not view them favorably. However, they, more than anything else, enabled the Kremlin to solidify and perpetuate a Russian presence in Egypt.

The ill-conceived and poorly coordinated British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt in October 1956 made Moscow appear to be Egypt's protector and friend in need. On

5 November when it became clear that the United States would insist upon British, French and Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory, Marshal Bulganin warned Israel that its existence was threatened by its participation in the attack on Egypt. Also, Britain and France were alerted to the fact that they could come under attack by "every kind of modern destructive weapon."²¹ These bold threats, delivered even while Russian tanks were moving to crush the Hungarian revolution, definitely gained the Soviets politically valuable credit in the Arab world. As for Nasser, the Suez crisis made him the undisputed champion of the Arab cause. Even though the Egyptian Army performed poorly, he got full control of the Suez Canal and dealt "imperialism" a grievous blow.

In the two years between the Suez War and the overthrow of the Iraqi Hashemites in the Baghdad coup of 1958, the short term objectives that had originally brought the Soviet Union into Egypt were essentially realized. Not only was the West's attempt to incorporate the Arab states of the Eastern Mediterranean into an anti-Soviet defense alliance stymied, but the Baghdad Pact system was itself crippled by Iraq's departure. With these initial objectives secured, Moscow began to concern itself more directly with political aims.

²¹Text of exchange of letters between Moscow, London and Paris in Hugh Thomas, Suez (New York, 1969), pp. 182-200.

The 1958 overthrow of Iraq's pro-West government led by General Kassem appeared to be a windfall for Moscow. Kassem cooperated closely with the Iraqi communists and they acquired many key governmental positions. The Soviet Union offered to assist the new regime and several loans were made. However, Soviet policy was hampered by the chronic inter-Arab disputes; conflicts which compelled Moscow to make choices between disputants. Nasser was backing the "Nasserites" and others opposed to Kassem and the local communists; therefore, Moscow's support for Kassem upset the Egyptian leader greatly. At the same time, the Soviet Union was not favorably disposed toward the 1958 Egyptian-Syrian merger (UAR) which led to the suppression of the relatively influential Syrian Communist Party.²² Moreover, Nasser's refusal to reach a modus vivendi with his own communists was a continuing source of irritation to the Soviets. The result was an Russian-Egyptian feud, touched off by Nasser's condemnation of communism in December 1958 and lasting till 1961.

In the Soviet Union, Khrushchev did not hide the fact that there were differences between the two countries; he

²²The United Arab Republic (UAR) was formed in February 1958 and was a union between Egypt and Syria. When Syria withdrew in September 1961, President Nasser continued to call Egypt the UAR. In April 1971 the UAR, Libya, and Syria agreed to join in a supranational federation to be called the Confederation of Arab Republics. This action was reported to be overwhelmingly approved by a plebiscite and in September the UAR became the Arab Republic of Egypt (ARE). At present writing each country conducts its own business and there is minimal coordination between members.

spoke against the "curtailment of democracy" in Egypt, but he always maintained that these differences should not interfere with the friendly state-to-state relations.²³ Soviet financial and technical assistance continued despite tensions during this period. In December 1958 an agreement was signed on the construction of the first stage of the Aswan Dam. The Soviets agreed to build the High Dam; to supply the necessary equipment and specialists, and to grant a loan of \$325 million which Cairo would repay in Egyptian currency at two and one-half percent interest.²⁴ In August 1960 the agreement for commencing construction on the second stage of the High Dam was signed.

In 1961 Egypt's internal course took a progressively more leftist course. The Egyptian-Syrian Union was floundering and Nasser felt that one reason Syria had desired secession was because of "capitalist reaction," which he felt jeopardized his own rule in Egypt. The official break with Syria came in the fall of 1961. Besides the blow to his prestige which the secession caused, Nasser was plagued with a stagnated economy which needed large infusions of capital to keep it alive. Beyond these immediate considerations, there was the long-range problem of enlarging the popular base of

²³Walter Laqueur, The Struggle for the Middle East (London, 1969), pp. 64-68.

²⁴Joshua, p. 13.

the regime to gain wider legitimacy for the ruling elite. The externally stalled revolutionary dynamic had to be switched to internal revolutionary action to justify and consolidate the leadership's power. Nasser's solution was to nationalize all banks, industry, maritime transport concerns and public utilities. Private land ownership was limited to 100 feddan per person and 200 feddan per family (one feddan equals 1.04 acres). In a country where 99 percent of the people were compressed onto 3.5 percent of the total land, making a population density of more than 2,500 people per square mile, this last act found support with the fellahin. But actually, no real significant redistribution of land or economic wealth took place. The Gross National Product grew at a rate of about six percent for four years following nationalization--mainly stimulated by substantial foreign borrowing--but then decelerated. Indeed, compared with other Middle East countries during the 1960-70 period, Egypt was at the bottom of the growth list with an annual average growth of 4.2 percent.²⁵ Its GNP for 1970 was \$5.87 billion, approximately \$175 per capita.²⁶

²⁵Saudi Arabia and Iran were at the top of the list with a 9.7 and 8.3 percent average growth rate respectively. Syria, Iraq and Turkey experienced average rates of 6 to 6.5 percent. See Jahangir Amuzegar, "Ideology and Economic Growth in the Middle East," The Middle East Journal, 28, No. 1 (Winter 1974), p. 5.

²⁶U.S. Department of State Publication 8152, "Egypt," (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 5.

Initial Soviet reaction to the 1961 nationalization decrees was favorable, but restrained. It was still a year of mutual accusations and ideological disputes in USSR-UAR forums, although the invective overtones had subsided. In 1962 a definite move toward reconciliation was begun. There was a transition from reservation to approval in the Soviet attitude toward the UAR. By 1963 the Soviets were hailing the implementation of the 1961 nationalization decrees as being in line with the interests of the whole Egyptian nation. They were very much a "progressive phenomenon," a "social revolution," and they clearly demonstrated that Egypt was on the path of "non-capitalist development."²⁷

The Soviets and Egyptians healed their differences in 1962-63 as it was in the best interests of both to do so. If Moscow was to be able to influence Egyptian and Arab policies, it had to effect a rapprochement with Cairo, the foremost power in the Arab world. As for Nasser, he needed an ever increasing amount of arms and aid as his ambitious military venture in Yeman, begun in 1962, strained both the resources of the economy and the army. Moreover, in 1962 Moscow was encouraged by the formation of a new Egyptian party organization, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU).²⁸ The ASU is germane

²⁷Y. Rozeliyev, "State Capitalism in Asia and Africa," International Affairs, (Moscow), No. 2 (February 1963), pp. 33-38.

²⁸The previous two parties, the National Liberation Rally and the National Union, failed from lack of support from either Nasser or the army.

to this study because the Soviets saw and still see, in it a means for realizing a larger role in Egyptian affairs. Soviet attempts to influence members of the ASU through Egyptian approved programs reached fruition in the late 1960's when Soviet advisers were instrumental in convening study seminars in Cairo and in setting up an ideological training center for ASU members. Also, the Kremlin encouraged Nasser, later Sadat, to fill positions in the party organization with Egyptians sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

Within the general framework of building an Egyptian socialist society, the objective of the ASU is to maintain the revolutionary drive by educating and organizing the masses. It has structural similarities to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), but more fundamental than its structure is its leadership. Since its inception the ASU has been dominated at the highest level by ex-officers sympathetic to the regime. Also, these individuals usually hold an office in the governmental structure. An interlocking relationship thus exists at the top between the governmental and party structures, which is quite similar to the Soviet system. The ASU has approximately seven million members (one out of every five compared to one out of every 18 in the CPSU) but there is a significant lack of interest manifest by the members. In fact, of the 38 percent of party members who did pay dues in 1972, most were workers or fellahin whose dues were auto-

matically deducted from their pay. Full-time, salaried members number only about 100.²⁹

While the ASU is supposed to be the main organ for expression of Egyptian socialism, it did not develop as expected in Moscow. Soviet calls, frequently repeated throughout the 1960's, to establish "a vanguard party" within the organization, which would become the country's leading force, received verbal approval from UAR leaders but little implementation. In 1969 Pravda observed that: "Many resolutions of the ASU National Congress mentioned words 'socialist society' and 'socialist measures.' This does not mean, of course, that socialism has been built in the UAR."³⁰ The ASU is not considered in the USSR to be a party, but a "national front," uniting divergent groups, not always with identical interests, which needs a "socialist vanguard" to guide and lead it.

After its reorganization in 1971, the Soviets warmed considerably, saying the ASU "has in effect been completely reconstructed," and an attempt was made "to create an effective, not just a formal, political organization."³¹

²⁹ Hrair Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir (Albany, 1971) pp. 145-153; Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "Egypt Since Nasser," Current History, 62, No. 365 (Jan. 1973), p. 12.

³⁰ Pravda, May 7, 1969. Except where otherwise noted, Russian language citations are from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Current Digest of the Soviet Press, a weekly journal of translations. Dates of publication refer to the original Soviet source.

³¹ Ibid., February 20, 1972.

In actuality, the ASU continues to function primarily as an administrative and bureaucratic arm of the leadership, and that is still centered in the military and executive. But to return to events following the reconciliation effected during 1962-1963.

In April 1964, in preparation for Khrushchev's May visit, Nasser released some 400 political prisoners, many of whom were communists, thereby giving tacit approval to their existence in Egypt. The Soviet delegation was warmly received in Cairo and Nasser received the "Hero of the Soviet Union" and the prestigious "Order of Lenin" medals from Khrushchev, along with a most complimentary citation.³² In his Aswan address, Khrushchev reminded his friends that the "unity of the workers of all nations" was a more important goal than any regional unity; however, he also stressed Egypt's "progressive" nature. At the farewell dinner in Cairo he announced a \$280 million loan for a large steel complex and other industries. Egypt's pro-Soviet Prime Minister, Ali Sabry, went to Moscow in September to complete arrangements for the new loan and while there also acquired an additional \$60 million for an agricultural project.

Khrushchev's ideological and practical endorsement of Nasser's regime, made during the May 1964 visit, met with resistance from the more orthodox ideologists in the Kremlin. Although it is not yet clear who opposed his most recent

³²Ibid., May 15, 1964.

pronouncements embracing Egypt, certain top members of the Politburo felt that Egypt did not exemplify a "revolutionary democratic state" on a "noncapitalist path of development."³³ This was one of the many things that led to extreme dissatisfaction of "Khrushchevism," which ultimately resulted in his removal from power in October 1964. Khrushchev was replaced by Leonid Brezhnev as First Secretary of the CPSU and by Alexei Kosygin as head of government. That the Soviet Union's new leadership did not assume more of a hard line policy towards Nasser was probably because of its open rivalry with Communist China; the need not to "lose face" in the eyes of other Third World countries; and the fact that the new leaders probably objected mainly to the personality, not the ideology, of the displaced Chairman.

Within a month of Khrushchev's demise, Field Marshal Amer was dispatched to Moscow where he met with Marshal Malinovsky, the Soviet defense minister, to assure him that the UAR was looking forward to continued friendly relations. To reinforce this theme Nasser supported the Soviet's attempts to aid the Congolese "government in exile" in late 1964. By December 1964 the Egyptians were flying Soviet transports, loaded with Russian and Czech arms, to Juba, Sudan, and from there the arms were moved to the eastern Congo. On 23 December Nasser said that, "I hereby confirm that

³³For more on this subject see, Uri Ra'anan, "Moscow and the Third World," Problems of Communism, XIV, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1965), 22-31.

we have sent arms to the Congo--and we shall send more."³⁴ The very next day Aleksandr Shelepin, a leading member of the Politburo who was in Cairo on an official visit, praised Egypt for its socialist construction and its foreign policy, especially in the Congo, and promised that economic aid would be continued by Moscow's new leadership.³⁵

Nasser went to Moscow in August 1965 to discuss future Soviet-Egyptian relations. While the Kremlin had opted for no change to its basic policy towards the UAR, Nasser was no less eager for Soviet support. He had by now come to depend on Soviet military hardware and Egypt's economy, after an initial upswing following the 1961 decrees was faltering. Furthermore, his position in the Arab world had suffered: he had quarrelled with Syria; there was open conflict with Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia; and the war in Yemen was going badly. Kosygin returned the visit nine months later. He told the Egyptian National Assembly (now called the People's Assembly) that he admired Egypt's social and economic progress and its continuous anti-imperialist struggle, and he promised further economic and military support.³⁶

In the ten years following 1955 the Soviet Union had, for the most part, maneuvered skillfully to implant itself in Egypt and the Middle East. There had been tangible benefits.

³⁴Quoted in Tareq Y. Ismael, The UAR in Africa (Evanston, 1971), p. 224.

³⁵Pravda, December 25, 1964.

³⁶Ibid., May 18, 1966.

Nasser had allowed the Soviets to make use of his country as a strategic transit point for arms to the Congo, and Moscow was to use the country as an intermediary to supply Yemeni rebels with arms from 1965 to 1970. Cairo received military aid totaling some \$1.3 billion prior to the 1967 June War while the Soviets were allowed to maintain some 500 military experts in Egypt to act as advisers and instructors.³⁷ Among other things, by introducing its military experts into the UAR and bringing them into contact with local power elites, the arms-aid program marked a notable departure from the continental isolation to which the Soviet Union's military establishment had previously been accustomed. As noted previously when speaking of the ASU, Soviet advisers did not limit themselves to their technical specialty. In 1966 a Soviet official wrote that it was the experts' job not only to give assistance in their "narrow specialty," but also to:

. . . give lectures on a wide variety of topics, to propagate by all means at their disposal the truth about the U.S.S.R. and the construction of the Communist society. It is this type of indoctrination that lays the foundations for the transition of these peoples [Third World] to socialism, while bypassing the painful stage of capitalistic development.³⁸

³⁷"The Arms Trade," Congressional Record, 115 No. 24 (Washington, D.C., 1969), 32093-95.

³⁸V. D. Shchetinin quoted in W. W. Kulski, The Soviet Union in World Affairs: A Documented Analysis 1964-1972 (New York, 1973), p. 185.

With these multirole experts came the first KOMAR patrol boats armed with Styx surface-to-surface missiles, and the first modern MIG 21s, delivered in 1962--by contrast the North Vietnamese did not receive MIG 21s till late 1967, and then only a very small number.

Egypt's well equipped armed forces allowed Nasser to pursue an activist foreign policy and enabled him to maintain his leadership in the Arab world. Nasser knew he was indebted to Moscow and needed its active support in his crusade against Israel, but he was careful to keep a grip on the country's internal governmental machinery. It appeared that Nasser could maintain close economic and military ties with the Soviet Union while not sacrificing Egyptian independence. Although interestingly enough, Khrushchev had once admitted that, "We value trade least for economic reasons and most for political reasons."³⁹

The Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 supplied additional cohesiveness to the Soviet-Egyptian relationship and marked the beginning of a new era of substantial military involvement for the USSR in the Middle East. With its sizable military and economic aid programs and its consistent political support of Egypt against Israel, Moscow had nurtured Cairo's expansionist ambitions and kept tensions high in the region, Moscow's warnings to Egypt about an impending Israeli attack on Syria encouraged Nasser to move his troops into the Sinai and to

³⁹Quoted in U.S. Department of State, The Sino-Soviet Economic Offensive in the Less Developed Countries (Washington, D.C., 1958).

blockade the Straits of Tiran. On May 22, 1967, just two weeks before hostilities began, Pravda reported that:

Israeli ruling circles openly threaten the start of an armed intervention in Syria. . . . The Israeli Army Command has ordered a partial mobilization of reservists. Israeli troops are concentrated on the Syrian border and are committing acts of provocation on land and in the air.

Yet when the Israeli government offered to let the Soviets inspect the border areas where the alleged "concentrations" were, Moscow declined.

Apparently Soviet leaders miscalculated the regional military balance or perhaps they would not have endorsed Nasser's demands for the removal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), at any rate events rapidly slipped beyond the Kremlin's ability to influence them decisively.

When the June War began, the Soviet Union made clear by its reactions the rank order of its objectives in the area. Its immediate resort to the hot-line highlighted its overriding interest in avoiding a superpower clash. For the USSR's protégés, this meant there could be no direct Soviet intervention--but for Moscow diplomatic "points" could still be scored. On 8 June Izvestia warned Israel that its actions threatened to uproot the foundation and "the very existence" of Israel. A Soviet Note to the Israeli government on June 10, 1967, announced Moscow's decision to sever diplomatic relations. Quite possibly the reason the Kremlin waited till the day that hostilities were virtually over, was so not to give the United States cause to believe that this was the first step to its direct involvement, thereby risking a perilous

confrontation. This late diplomatic move was reminiscent of Soviet diplomacy in the Suez Crisis (and we will see another example of it in October 1973).

Prompt rearmament of Egyptian forces after the war indicated that Egypt remained the keystone of Soviet policy in the Middle East. Head of State Nikolai Podgorny arrived in Cairo in late June and Nasser pressed not only for arms but also for increased Soviet personnel. Nasser realized that the military forces' basic problem was lack of military competence; the soldiers needed to gain confidence in themselves and their superiors, and they needed esprit de corps. Within four months, about 80 percent of Cairo's losses had been replaced. New weapons were introduced into the Egyptian arsenal and Soviet military advisers, numbering some 500 before the war, were within a few months expanded to 3,000 officers.⁴⁰ Never, with the exception of Cuba, had the USSR deployed such large numbers of its own military personnel outside the Warsaw Pact area. By October 1968, the value of Soviet arms deliveries to Egypt since June 1967 was estimated at \$1.4 billion.⁴¹

Shortly following the end of hostilities there was a rash of Soviet articles castigating "reactionary" elements of the Egyptian officer corps for allowing the Israeli victory.⁴²

⁴⁰Joshua, pp. 15-16.

⁴¹Laqueur, p. 82.

⁴²For example see, Pravda, July 25, 1967; August 9, 1967; Izvestia, July 23, 1967.

In response to Soviet urgings to reorganize the Egyptian command structure and to indoctrinate new officers, more than 600 officers were replaced including Marshal Amer. It was obvious that the Kremlin had gained considerable influence in Egyptian military affairs through generous amounts of arms aid.

Egypt's defeat caused consternation and embarrassment in Moscow but there were basic reasons for staying with the "game plan" of support for Egypt: it would have a deleterious effect on other friendly and "noncommitted" Third World countries if the Soviets were to cease support; it would give China a golden opportunity to unleash further propaganda attacks on Moscow; Nasser had managed to come through the defeat as an Arab hero; and the confusion in Egypt resulting from defeat presented Moscow an unprecedented opportunity for gaining a greater degree of institutionalized control of the country.

Kremlin leaders apparently decided that a continuing flow of Soviet weapons to Egypt was the quickest and surest way to gain this control. From mid June 1967 till Nasser's death in September 1970, the most striking feature of the Soviet-Egyptian relationship was the ever increasing arms buildup of Egypt's armed forces, combined with a continued influx of Soviet military advisers. By 1968 Russian crews were flying their aircraft from Egyptian airfields and the Soviets completely controlled six air bases by 1970. The flights provided reconnaissance support and much needed air cover for Soviet naval forces in the Mediterranean.

Early in 1970, following a trip by Nasser to Moscow, the Soviets energetically began to establish an up-to-date surface-to-air missile (SAM) system in Egypt. This new move, while in keeping with Moscow's policy of large scale arms aid, was precipitated by two factors. First was the Israeli "deep penetration" air attacks which reached the outskirts of Cairo in December 1969 and January 1970. Nasser came under great pressure to prove to his people, and the Arab world in general, that he could defend the homeland. Rather than halting Egypt's intensified artillery shelling along the Sinai front, in return for a cessation of Israeli air raids, Nasser decided to turn to Moscow for help. The second factor, from the Soviets view-point, was Russian aircraft losses. From after the June War to mid 1970 some 150 MIG fighter aircraft, piloted by Egyptians, had been shot down in aerial duals.⁴³ The "war of attrition" declared by Nasser had once again shown that Israeli jets were masters of the air--including Egyptian air-space. Not having an unlimited number of modern fighter planes, the Soviets recognized a need to provide Egypt with an adequate air defense system.

By October 1970, 500 to 600 SAM launchers had been systematically placed to cover the threat zones, about 200 of the SAMs being within 19 miles of the Canal. Along with the well known SA-2 missiles and antiaircraft guns, came SA-3 missiles. These improved SAMs, which the Soviet Union never

⁴³International Institute for Strategic Studies, Strategic Survey 1970 (London, 1971), p. 48.

did entrust to North Vietnam, were capable of coping with high speed, low-flying attack aircraft. Some 12,000-15,000 Soviet troops were sent to operate the new systems, and approximately 150 MIG-21Js were manned by Russian pilots in an effort to upgrade the Egyptian Air Force.⁴⁴ The insertion of the Soviet air defense screen seriously affected the Egyptian-Israeli military situation, as air supremacy is a crucial element in the balance of forces between Arabs and Israelis. Israel's deterrent strategy was based on the option of launching a preemptive airstrike. The Soviet defense network rendered a repeat performance of 1967 unlikely, as 1973 was to prove.

On the political scene, Nasser pleased Moscow by announcing in 1968 his "March 30 program" (taken from a speech on that day). The main feature of the new program, Pravda said, was to shift the center of gravity of Egyptian government from administrative agencies to the Arab Socialist Union. The ASU would be reorganized and revitalized and its governing council would become "the supreme body of the State." The second feature of the program was a gradual replacement of administrative officials by people who had "appropriate" qualifications and were devoted to the revolution. "This part of the program can be qualified as a refusal to use the army as the main source to replenish all links of the machinery of state."⁴⁵ The program was not pushed with any particular vigor

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁵Pravda, April 29, 1968.

in 1969-1970 as Nasser was more caught up in maintaining his power base, trying to arrest the country's economic decline, and reconsolidating his leadership standing vis à vis other Arab States.

Nasser's sudden death in late 1970 closed an era of Soviet-Egyptian relations that had, in sum, seen the two countries expand and strengthen military, economic and political ties.

The chronological sequence will now be temporarily abandoned in order to investigate an important, and heretofore little mentioned, aspect of the Soviet Union's presence in Egypt.

IV. MOSCOW'S NAVAL DIPLOMACY

The Arab-Israeli War in June 1967 moved Soviet-Egyptian relations to a new plane that had profound effects on the depth of Soviet involvement in the Middle East. One of the most dramatic manifestations of the USSR presence following the June War was the growth of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron. Because the Soviets saw this naval force as another means of projecting their presence into the region, and as Egyptian support was, and still is, considered essential for maximum effectiveness of the now much expanded squadron, it behooves us to examine Moscow's naval diplomacy as it relates to the Middle East.

Admiral S. G. Gorshkov, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy since 1956 and a member of the Central Committee, rationalizes that a great power which lacks substantial naval forces will ultimately join the ranks of second-rate powers. He holds that Napoleon could have conquered Egypt in 1789 if the French Navy had been stronger.⁴⁶ Gorshkov maintains that the Soviet Navy played a "decisive role in frustrating the adventurous plans of the Israeli aggressors" in the June War,⁴⁷

⁴⁶S. G. Gorshkov, "Navies in War and Peace," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, 100, No. 1 (Jan. 1974), p. 25. I hesitate to make an analogy between France and the USSR in Egypt, but Gorshkov's tone makes one wonder what would have happened in the 1956 Suez Crisis if the Soviets had possessed a powerful Mediterranean fleet.

⁴⁷Pravda, July 30, 1967.

but actually there was no tactically strong Soviet presence in the Mediterranean till after June 18, 1967--well after the military situation had been resolved. Since that time, the Soviet fleet has consisted of a balanced force, though lacking adequate air cover, of about 40-48 ships (this number doubled during the 1973 October War but then returned to the pre-war level). Present in the force are ALLIGATOR type landing ships which carry eight to ten tanks plus naval marines. This gives the Russians an amphibious capability to make at least small unopposed landings from waterways of the region, thus creating the possibility for future Soviet fait accomplis in areas where even small-scale operations might have large political consequences.

The initial impetus for the creation of the Mediterranean squadron in 1964 came from a strategic need to degrade the nuclear offensive capabilities of the United States Sixth Fleet. However, since June 1967 there has been increased emphasis on being able to project a political presence through the use of naval forces operating throughout the entire area. In 1967 Gorshkov praised:

. . . the crews of the ships sailing in the Mediterranean Sea, who are fulfilling the responsible task of safeguarding the state interests of the Soviet Union in this region.⁴⁸

The term "state interests" covers much ground and undoubtedly includes the use of limited naval force to achieve diplomatic ends. In 1969 Radio Moscow reported that "a new power has

⁴⁸Krasnaya Zvezda, February 11, 1967.

has appeared in the Mediterranean, the Soviet Union. Its presence there has political, psychological and military importance."⁴⁹ Sir John Hamilton, former Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Mediterranean, felt that the presence of the Soviet fleet had a profound effect on the local inhabitants and in this respect it contributed significantly to the rise of Soviet influence in the Mediterranean area.⁵⁰ In January 1968 Radio Baghdad announced:

The Soviet Union, by its military maneuvers and by moving about its fleet units in the Mediterranean, has given the proof that it is not prepared to water down the Middle East question. . . .⁵¹

In May, Tunisia's President Bourguiba noted that the deployment of Soviet naval forces to the area had undermined the old balance of power, previously in favor of the West.⁵²

In September 1969 Soviet ships conducted amphibious exercises with the Egyptian and Syrian Navies, which have been supplied with a number of landing craft and coastal defense vessels. These were the first instances of combined maneuvers with Arab navies and underscore the degree to which the Soviet Navy had become involved in the region.

By moving into the Mediterranean Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, the Soviet Navy itself acted as a

⁴⁹Quoted in Soviet Sea Power, Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C., 1969), p. 59.

⁵⁰United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, The Changing Strategic Naval Balance, U.S.S.R. vs U.S.A., (Washington, D.C., 1968), p. 31.

⁵¹Quoted in Klicman, p. 83.

⁵²Thomas W. Wolfe, Soviet Power and Europe 1945-1970 (Baltimore, 1970), p. 342.

flexible "southern border" far from the Russian heartland, thus giving added protection to the nation. Also, the Soviet fleet provided a direct and continuous military link to non-contiguous Middle East countries. A secure link with Arab states never before existed as the Soviet Union has had no friendly border countries through which it could move to reach its Arab allies. This dilemma of not having the means or ability to support policy aims--that is, no credible navy--had in the past seriously affected Soviet strategy.

Stalin twice found that his lack of naval power in the Mediterranean dictated a shift in plans. First, during the Spanish Civil War, Russian merchant ships engaged in supplying the Republicans with materials were often interfered with, even sunk, and though the Kremlin protested, without a navy the protests went unheeded. The second instance occurred in 1948. Stalin felt that the revolt in Greece had no chance of success because of the presence of powerful Western navies. He is quoted as saying:

What do you think, that Great Britain and the United States--the United States the most powerful State in the world--will permit you to break their line of communications in the Mediterranean Sea. Nonsense, and we have no navy. The uprising in Greece must be stopped, and as quickly as possible.⁵³

Navies have certain inherent advantages over land or air forces which the Soviets have put to good use in Egypt. A navy can be seen, or not seen, and therefore if used properly

⁵³ Milovan Djilas, Conversations with Stalin (New York, 1962), p. 182.

it produces no local resentment, as an encamped army is bound to provide. Also, a navy retains the ability to intervene without automatically incurring a greater national commitment while at the same time promoting national objectives. An example of this occurred a month after the June War had ended. On July 10, amid much favorable publicity, a dozen Soviet warships visited Port Said and Admiral Molochov announced that "we are ready to cooperate with Egyptian armed forces to repel any aggression."⁵⁴ This bold declaration was reinforced and gained real credibility shortly thereafter when units of the Soviet fleet sailed purposely into Egyptian ports immediately after the sinking of the Israeli destroyer Elath, effectively deterring Israeli retaliation against Egyptian ships in their harbors. This act of "gunboat diplomacy" in support of Cairo had the desired impact on the populace. In 1968 Nasser welcomed the Soviet Navy to Egyptian shores, calling it the "new shield of the progressive Arab States."⁵⁵

From that time on Soviet warships made extensive use of Port Said and Alexandria as "facilities" ("base" implies a loss of sovereignty) for completing ship repairs, refueling and resupply. By allowing Soviet ships to use Egyptian ports on a routine basis, Nasser set a precedent for other countries in

⁵⁴Quoted in Randolph and Winston Churchill, The Six Day War (Boston, 1969), p. 207.

⁵⁵Quoted in Walter Laqueur, "Russia Enters the Middle East," Foreign Affairs 47, No. 2 (Jan. 1969), p. 299.

the region. By 1970 the Russians had obtained agreements to use the port facilities at Messewa, Ethiopia; Hodeida, Yemen; Berbera, Somalia; Latakia, Syria; and Vishakhapatnam, India. More recently, Soviet naval combatants and support ships have had unlimited access to the expanded Persian Gulf Iraqi naval port of Umm Qasr, where facilities are being built with the assistance of Soviet technicians. Also, since 1971 Soviet naval units have been engaged in harbor clearance and construction operations at Chittagong, Bangladesh.

In 1970 a writer for the Red Star commented:

The age old dreams of our people have become a reality. The pennants of the Soviets ships now flutter in the most remote corners of the sea and oceans. Our Navy is a real force and possesses the ability to resolve successfully the tasks of defending the state interests of the Soviet Union and of the whole socialist world.⁵⁶

While this may be a somewhat inflated statement, the Soviets certainly did expand and strengthen their naval power in the Mediterranean-Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean area between June 1967 and the end of 1970--and the growth did not stop then.

For example, prior to 1968 the Russian Navy spent less than 100 ship days annually in the Indian Ocean and in 1968 it compiled 1800 ship days there. During 1972 this figure had leaped to 8800 ship days.⁵⁷ The strength of the Soviet naval

⁵⁶ Cited in David Fairhall, Russia Looks to the Sea (London, 1971), p. 261. The Soviets assisted in developing the ports of Hodeida, Berbera, Latakia, and Vishakhapatnam. They also helped construct the Indian naval base at Vizog, in the Andaman Islands.

⁵⁷ New York Times, January 25, 1974, p. 6.

force operating in the northwest Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea 1972-1975 was five to six combatants and five to eight auxiliaries.⁵⁸

The increased presence throughout the region was to a large measure made possible by the new de facto Soviet bases that facilitated the repair and upkeep of warships, allowing for longer "on station" time and improved operational efficiency. While foreign "installations" served Moscow's interests, the Soviets viewed overseas "bases" as something evil:

Military bases on foreign territories create a serious threat to the peace. Such bases serve as a source of the outbreak of military conflicts and threaten the freedom and independence of the peoples.⁵⁹

This dissonance between what one says and what one does may be attributed to Soviet dialectic thinking or, more conceivably, to analytical reasoning and pragmatic goals.

The special relationship existing between Moscow and Cairo ensured the Soviet Navy an anchorage in Egyptian ports while, because of unpredictable internal upheavals, the navy's use of other Arab ports south of the Suez Canal was more

⁵⁸United States Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia, United States Interest In and Policies Toward South Asia (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 91; and New York Times, March 6, 1975, p. 12. In contrast, the United States Navy maintains a permanent force of two destroyers and one auxiliary in the same area.

⁵⁹"Soviet Memorandum on Disarmament," (July, 1968), in Rubinstein, p. 366.

tenuous(bear in mind that Ras Banas, Egypt's Red Sea port, was open for Soviet use). Since Cairo could be relied on for these bases, Egypt quite naturally acquired a particular geographical significance for the navy.

When the Soviets had to leave Egypt in July 1972 (more on this in Section V), the navy was not deprived of its "visitation rights" to Egyptian ports, but, because of strained Soviet-Egyptian relations, Soviet warships were not given the favored treatment that they had previously received. Consequently, the squadron began to operate primarily from the Syrian port of Latakia. And yet, for the Kremlin's naval planners, Egypt retained its geostrategic importance. This was (1) because its southern port, Ras Banas, could provide facilities for the navy's Indian Ocean flotilla; (2) because Alexandria and Port Said were superior to Latakia in terms of berthing, repair capability, and storage area; and (3) because the Suez Canal retained its potential strategic importance. An operational Suez Canal would substantially add to the efficacy and mobility of the Soviet Mediterranean naval forces. All Soviet warships, including the 45,000 ton V/STOL aircraft carrier Kiev, can navigate the Canal. On the other hand, the size of United States aircraft carriers presently precludes their use of the Canal. At present, Admiral Gorshkov's ships operating in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf come from Vladivostok, steaming some 2500 miles further than if they could come from the Black Sea naval base of Sevastopol via the Canal, and some 3500 miles further than if they could depart

from Alexandria or Port Said. Obviously, the Soviets would like to reduce this extended line of communication with its attendant logistic problems.

The Russian merchant fleet also has an interest in a reopened Canal. In its last year of operation, ten million tons of Soviet merchant shipping traversed that waterway, making the USSR the Canal's seventh highest user.

An operational Suez Canal would not only be beneficial militarily and commercially, but could prove to be politically important. One could think of a situation like that of July 1968, when Russian warships entered Egyptian ports after the Elath was sunk so as to deter a retaliatory Israeli strike against Egyptian naval vessels. In the projected hypothetical situation, units of the Soviet Navy would move into the Canal during an Arab-Israeli flare-up. Cairo would announce the fact that it had invited such a presence and Moscow would give Israel some appropriate warning as to what would happen if Israeli forces interfered with the freedom of movement of Soviet naval vessels in the Canal. In effect, by its physical presence the Soviet Union could, as a neutral country, protect Egyptian territory and targets.

Another waterway in the area which commands attention is the Strait of Hormuz, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean. Through this Strait passes more than 400 tankers per week carrying some 50 percent of all

Middle East oil.⁶⁰ Access to the oil producing Gulf states through the Strait is essential to the livelihood of Western Europe and Japan; therefore, control of this choke-point during a crisis period is a vital factor for consideration. The Soviet Navy's Indian Ocean force has maintained a presence near the Persian Gulf since 1970 and has often transited the Strait of Hormuz to visit the Iraqi naval base, Umm Qasr. In fact, in 1973 Soviet warships made more visits to Iraq (Umm Qasr) than they did to any other country in the region.⁶¹ An operational Suez Canal and use of Egyptian ports would enable the Soviet Mediterranean fleet to project considerable military strength to the Gulf area which would not go unnoticed by weak, yet oil rich, Gulf Shaykhdoms. This is one reason, among others, why Moscow now wants to re-establish good relations with Cairo.

While the Russian Navy's mission includes the historic role of "showing the flag," the use of Soviet naval diplomacy in the Middle East can now take additional forms. During the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war the Soviets temporarily more than doubled their Mediterranean force, from 43 to approximately 98 ships, which, aside from a simple show

⁶⁰Central Intelligence Agency, Issues in the Middle East (1973), p. 34.

⁶¹Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. "Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean," Armed Forces Journal International III, No. 8 (April, 1974), p. 29.

of force to bolster Arab morale, indicated that Moscow sees the region as strategically important and intends to protect its gains. There can be no doubt that Egypt, because of its importance to the Soviet Navy, figures prominently in the tactical and strategic considerations of Kremlin leaders.

We will now return to the historical sequence of Soviet policy in Egypt.

V. POLICY SINCE NASSER

President Nasser's death on September 28, 1970, reemphasized to Soviet leaders that the continuation of existing relations between both countries, the fate of the Soviet presence and of the large Soviet investment, were to a great extent dependent on the regime in Egypt and, to a certain extent, on whom would be Nasser's successor. Prime Minister Kosygin and his party of Marshal Zakharov, General Lashehenko and Colonel Okunev left immediately for Cairo where they stayed from September 29 to October 3, 1970. The predominant military makeup of the party suggested that the Soviets did not hesitate to underscore the dependent military relationship which existed between the two countries. On 1 October Kosygin, in a message to the nation over Cairo radio, pledged continued Soviet support in all fields and expressed confidence that the death of Nasser would not create a vacuum that would weaken the country.⁶² At the close of the visit the joint Soviet-Egyptian communiqué declared:

. . . the governments of the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic have always regarded the friendly relations between the two countries as a stable factor, untouched by the various turns in international developments . . . mutual determination was expressed to fostering on the previous basis, the close ties of friendship and cooperation.⁶³

⁶²New York Times, October 2, 1970, p. 16.

⁶³Pravda, October 4, 1970.

The semi-official Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, was quoted by the Soviet journal New Times as saying that the USSR "is the only source of our military might . . . without the Soviet Union we would have no choice but to accept the victors terms." It also quoted acting President Sadat as saying that:

. . . politically, militarily and economically the Soviet Union has stood, and is standing by us unconditionally. There are rumors abroad that it is seeking to sovietize our country and its economy. They are all false. The Soviet Union is an honest and true friend.⁶⁴

Anwar Sadat, Nasser's vice president and one of the original Free Officers who overthrew King Farouk, was described by the New York Times in 1970 as a left-of-center politician who held an uncompromising anti-Israeli position.⁶⁵ He was sworn in as President on October 18 of that year and on November 13 he was "unanimously elected" chairman of the Arab Socialist Union. Shortly after becoming President, Sadat announced that the country would be guided by Nasser's "March 30 program." The country was to be transformed into a modern society based on democracy, science and technology. At the end of the year, Ali Sabry, now one of two Vice Presidents, went to Moscow to discuss further economic assistance. There he laid the groundwork for a \$415 million loan, officially announced in March 1971, to be used by Cairo for industrial and rural improvement projects. And so, it initially appeared as if Soviet-Egyptian relations had not been altered by a change in Egypt's leadership.

⁶⁴Yodfat, p. 277.

⁶⁵New York Times, September 29, 1970, p. 17.

Three events of importance in 1971 affected Soviet-Egyptian relations. First, the May dismissal of Vice President Sabry which signalled the start of a consolidation of power by Sadat; second, a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the two countries was ratified; and third, the role Cairo played in the Sudan coup.

The governmental shake-up which began on 2 May with the dismissal of pro-Soviet Sabry and five ministers, including War Minister Mohammed Fawzi, was said to have taken place because of an alleged conspiracy against Sadat by several top officials. General Sadek, the Chief of Staff, took the War portfolio and it was probably he that assured Sadat of the army's support throughout the crisis period. In all, 91 former high officials were put on trial for "high treason" in August 1971 and most were sentenced to prison. Many of these officials held positions in the ideological secretariat of the ASU and were strong supporters of the Soviet Union, or were communist sympathizers. There is another school of thought that contends that the dismissal of Sabry was intended as a signal to Washington that Cairo was prepared for renewed ties with the West. This is because of the particular timing of Sabry's demise. It occurred just three days prior to the arrival of Secretary William Rogers, the first official visit of a United States Secretary of State to Egypt since 1953. At any rate, Moscow could not have been pleased with the new events. It reacted to Sadat's "reorganization" by sending Nikolai Podgorny, number three man in the ruling triumvirate,

to Cairo on May 25 to make sure that internal political changes would not endanger the Soviet position in Egypt.

The Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in Cairo on May 27, 1971, was the result of the Podgorny-Sadat talks. It was hailed by both parties as a milestone in their friendly relations.

There was no question but that the treaty was, at that time, a diplomatic landmark in Soviet-Egyptian relations. Articles 5, 7 and 8 appeared to open possibilities for increased Soviet influence in Egypt. Article 5 said that the UAR and USSR would "expand and deepen all-round cooperation and the exchange of experience in the economic, scientific and technological fields." They would also expand trade and maritime shipping between the two countries "on the basis of the principles of mutual benefit and most-favored-nation treatment." Article 7 pledged the two countries to consult together regularly "on all important questions affecting the interests of both States." It added:

In the event of situations developing which, in the opinion of both sides, create a danger to peace, they will contact each other without delay in order to concert their positions with a view to removing the threat that has arisen or restoring peace.

Article 8 said that the two countries would "continue to develop cooperation in the military field" and added:

Such cooperation will provide specifically for assistance in the training of UAR military personnel and in mastering the armaments and equipment supplied to the UAR. . . .⁶⁶

⁶⁶Text of treaty from Pravda, May 29, 1971; Izvestia, May 29, 1971.

Never before had the two countries been legally linked to one another, and interestingly never before had the Soviet Union signed such a politico-military treaty with a Third World nation.

The Soviets now had an internationally recognized treaty that would enable them to strengthen their ties with Egypt, and by various means. International Affairs (Moscow) reported that:

Soviet-Egyptian cooperation has become a model of relations between a socialist state and a revolutionary-democratic regime in a country fighting for national revival . . . no document in the history of Soviet-Arab relations compares with this treaty in the scope of the problems it covers. . . . The Soviet presence in the Middle East is a political reality which cannot be brushed aside under any circumstances. The Soviet presence strengthens the anti-imperialist front and frustrates the plans of the Israeli hawks and their U.S. patrons.⁶⁷

There is some speculation that Sadat signed the Treaty of Friendship as a quid pro quo to keep the Soviets from meddling in his domestic affairs--on the side of Ali Sabry. It is difficult to defend this theory because of Sadat's plans for the fight against Israeli. In July, not quite two months after signing the treaty, he promised the Egyptian people, in an important speech to the ASU, that 1971 would be "the year of decision" in the Arab-Israeli conflict. If by some clairvoyance he had known there would be a peace settlement favorable to Egypt, then perhaps he could discount Soviet military aid. But,

⁶⁷E. Dmitriev, "Soviet-Arab Friendship: A New Stage," International Affairs, (Moscow), No. 8 (Aug. 1971), pp. 66-68. Emphasis added.

realistically it was impossible for the Egyptian armed forces to back his statement without Soviet help. So, even if the Russians had chosen to try and influence Egypt's internal realignment, Sadat would have signed the treaty--his need for Soviet arms was paramount.

The third event in 1971 directly affecting Moscow-Cairo relations was the Sudan rebellion. In July the Sudanese Communists led a successful coup against Premier Ja'afar Numeiry's government. Sadat reportedly refused a request by Soviet ambassador Vinogradov that Egypt recognize the new regime. He is said to have told the ambassador, "You should know that we Arabs will never be Marxist. That is why we cannot allow a Communist regime to exist in the Arab world."⁶⁸ Sadat then actively supported pro-Numeiry forces in a successful counter-coup, despite Soviet urgings to the contrary. However, the tension created by Cairo's independent and anti-Soviet stand subsided in view of the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict. Muhammad Heikel, editor of the Al-Ahram and at that time still a power in the government, wrote that the Arabs could not afford to alienate the Soviet Union, whose support was then essential in the stand against Israel.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Quoted in Jaan Pennar, The U.S.S.R. and the Arabs; The Ideological Dimension 1917-1972 (New York, 1973), p. 50.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 51.

Another event that occurred in 1971 that again illustrated the basic ideological schism between Egypt and the USSR, was that a new Constitution went into effect. In its 193 articles, the Constitution--the first to be given to Egypt since the 1952 revolution, and replacing the provisional Constitution of 1964--incorporated many of Sadat's promises to restrict the powers of the country's security forces, to guarantee the rule of law and to safeguard the freedom of individual citizens. While the country was declared a "democratic and socialist State based on the alliance of the working forces of the people," religion remained a basic force. Article 2 stated: "Islam is the religion of the State. The principles of Islamic legislation constitute the essential source of the law."⁷⁰ Islamic belief and traditions have certainly remained powerful forces in Egyptian society; Sadat himself is a devout Muslim.

The year 1972 saw a significant and unexpected development in Soviet-Egyptian relations. On 18 July President Sadat ordered the immediate withdrawal of Soviet military troops, advisers, and experts from Egypt, and demanded that all Soviet equipment and bases on Egyptian territory be placed under the exclusive control of Cairo.⁷¹ There were several reasons for Sadat's move that need to be considered.

⁷⁰Keesings' Contemporary Archives Vol. XVIII (1971-1972), pp. 25065-66.

⁷¹Text of Sadat's statement in New York Times, July 19, 1972, p. 15.

The fundamental reason for expelling the Soviets stemmed from the fact that there was (and continues to be) an asymmetry in Moscow-Cairo policy aims. The asymmetry became more pronounced in the early 1970s. Attention was focused on the question: Should Egypt take any and all steps necessary to regain the Israeli occupied territories and end the "no war, no peace" status quo, or should Cairo limit itself solely to diplomatic measures aimed at resolving these problems? Moscow's view, unswerving since late 1967, was that there should be a peaceful (diplomatic) resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the Arab interpretation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967, i.e. Israel must return to its pre-1967 borders as a prerequisite for commencing substantive peace negotiations. The Kremlin's stand neatly allowed it (1) to take advantage of continuing tension caused by "no war, no peace"; (2) to continue active diplomatic backing for "client" Arab states; and (3) to avoid jeopardizing détente policies. By mid 1972, détente, with its much needed attendant economic and technological benefits, was a program to which Mr. Brezhnev and some other Soviet leaders were intimately linked. Its importance overshadowed many other policy inputs that figured into Moscow's equation for global strategy--one of these inputs being the Egyptian factor.

As for Cairo, by not having world wide interests, it could well afford a narrower outlook. Among other things, it wanted Egyptian territory taken as a result of the 1967 June

War returned; if superpower détente suffered as a consequence, so be it. President Sadat came to the conclusion that a major military action was needed to set in motion the delayed process of regaining occupied Arab lands. In July 1971 he officially announced to the Arab Socialist Union that 1971 would be the "year of decision" in the struggle against Israel. He then made three trips to Moscow within seven months and it is logical to assume that he tried to convince Soviet leaders of the feasibility for implementing stated aims through the use of military force. However, to preclude prejudicing its overall foreign policy aims, Moscow remained adamant in its insistence that there be no new Arab-Israeli war. The press reports and joint communiqués released after each of Sadat's trips were essentially identical: the Soviets promised to take measures aimed at "increasing" or "strengthening" Egypt's "military might," yet they never advocated anything stronger than calling for a:

. . . just settlement in the Near East based on the fulfillment of all the provisions of the November 22, 1967 Security Council resolution, first of all the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967.⁷²

There was no hint of approval for renewed military moves, though Moscow had not hesitated in the past to call for military action to support "just" causes.

⁷²Coverage of Sadat's three trips in Pravda, October 9, 13 and 14, 1971, February 5 and 6, 1972, April 30, 1972; and Izvestia, October 15, 1971, February 5, 1972, May 1, 1972.

The Kremlin was able to wield a "war veto" primarily because of the influence it had in Egyptian military affairs. Recall that there were still some 5,000 Soviet advisers in the Egyptian military structure, some 12,000-15,000 Soviet troops manned virtually all the more advanced SA-3 SAM sites that constituted Cairo's front line air defenses and Soviet pilots were active in the airborne defense role.

Although Sadat undoubtedly pushed for Soviet approval of Egyptian military plans during his three visits to Moscow (October 1971, February and April 1972), the Egyptian leader maintains that he very frankly told Brezhnev at their last meeting in April that Egypt must fight--there was no other alternative. The Communist Party leader's answer was that he did not want a superpower confrontation,⁷³ in other words, he had more than simply Egyptian problems to consider. (After Mr. Nixon was re-elected President in November 1972, Sadat received a letter from Brezhnev that again emphasized détente policies and contended that the present Middle East situation would have to be accepted, or at least not changed through resort to arms.⁷⁴) And so, in order to rid himself of Moscow's restraining hand, President Sadat, in July 1972, ordered the Soviets out of Egypt. As he later admitted, "I expelled them to give myself complete freedom of action."⁷⁵

⁷³Sunday Times (London), December 9, 1973, p. 33.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 33.

⁷⁵Quoted in (Sunday Times [London] Insight Team), Insight on the Middle East War (London, 1974), p. 33.

In this instance, the difference in Moscow-Cairo policy aims--a part of the asymmetry in their relationship--resulted in a dramatic decrease of the Soviets presence and influence in Egypt.

Four other factors that had a positive impact on Sadat's decision to expel the Soviets from Egypt are worth mentioning. First, although the Soviets did promise to strengthen Cairo's armed forces, they were either slow to act or did not deliver the weapons that Cairo requested--such as the variable geometry wing MIG-23 and the medium range SCUD-C surface-to-surface missile. In a speech to the Arab Socialist Union Sadat said that after the signing of the Egyptian-Soviet friendship treaty in May 1971, it had been clearly laid down that the USSR would furnish Egypt with specific types of arms and by specific dates, for the battle with Israel. "But," he said, "these armaments did not arrive on the stipulated dates."⁷⁶ Second, a general feeling of animosity existed between high ranking Egyptian officers and Soviet advisers which was definitely a factor. The chief Soviet military adviser to Defense Minister Sadek was expelled from Egypt in February 1972, reportedly for publicly criticizing Egyptian military ability. That appeared to be an isolated action, but it reflected the growing breach between the Egyptian military and its Soviet advisers. Seemingly, by

⁷⁶Keesings' Contemporary Archives Vol. XVIII (1971-72), pp. 25397-98.

July this breach had widened. Sources in Lebanon reported that the Egyptian command threatened Sadat with a coup d'etat if he did not have the USSR recall its advisers. If true, Sadat could not have ignored such a warning. Defense Minister Sadek was said to be the main instigator of anti-Soviet feeling within the Army.⁷⁷ Third, Cairo was annoyed with the outcome of the Nixon-Brezhnev Summit meeting (May 1972) in Moscow. The two superpower leaders agreed that strife in the Middle East was to be avoided and called for "support of a peaceful settlement in accordance with Security Council Resolution No. 242."⁷⁸ Sadat felt that his program against Israel had been compromised by the Kremlin for détente and enhanced Soviet-American relations. Fourth, Soviet-Iraqi relations had recently become much closer with the signing of their Friendship Treaty on April 9, 1972 (along the same lines as the Egyptian-Soviet treaty). A year before the Russians had loaned Baghdad \$210 million, they were developing Iraq's North Rumaila oil field, and their support had enabled President Bakr to nationalize the Iraq Petroleum Company (consortium of American, British, Dutch and French firms) in June, 1972. The delicate power relationships between rival Arab states could be easily upset by Soviet favoritism to the

⁷⁷ New York Times, July 21, 1972, p. 1.

⁷⁸ For text see Nixon: The Fifth Year of His Presidency (Congressional Quarterly, Washington, D.C. 1974), pp. 121a, 125a-26a.

Bakr regime and it was conceivable that Sadat was looking for something that would, in addition to giving himself maneuvering room, promote his standing among the more conservative, oil rich Arab States.

In sum, the expulsion of Soviet troops from Egypt in July 1972 was, as Sadat in effect has said, necessary to combat Moscow's veto of Cairo's war plans. Such things as friction between Egyptian officers and their Soviet advisers, unfulfilled orders of certain types of arms, and increased Soviet interest in Iraq all added to a frustrated Egyptian leadership checked by Soviet global strategy.

The Soviets were caught by surprise by Sadat's expulsion order, however, they did pull out "meekly" because they really had no option. If they had insisted on staying, their credibility with the Third World would have vanished and this would have caused irreparable harm to their foreign policy programs and aims. Within three short weeks approximately 20,000 Soviet military personnel were withdrawn and by year's end only some 700 highly technical advisers remained.⁷⁹

Soviet-Egyptian relations remained in a state of flux from July 1972 to October 1973.

The Kremlin indicated its displeasure with the July expulsion order by halting the flow of spare parts to Egypt needed by Cairo to keep its military machine effective. Yet

⁷⁹ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Strategic Survey 1972 (London, 1973), p. 26.

in October 1972 the Soviets abandoned that tact and replacement parts for arms were once again supplied. Also, that month the Soviets agreed to send Egypt some 60 SA-6 SAMS, extremely mobile and accurate missiles that had never before been deployed outside of the Warsaw Pact countries.⁸⁰ Probably the immediate reason why Moscow began to resupply replacement parts was because Sadat dismissed War Minister Sedek who was known to have strong anti-Soviet feelings. His ouster was followed by that of Admiral Rahman, Commander of the Egyptian Navy, who was also an outspoken critic of the Soviets. Another later factor affecting the decision for increased deliveries of military hardware was the inclusion of Marshal Grechko, the Defense Minister who had close personal ties with Brezhnev, into the Politburo in April 1973. Marshal Grechko had long been associated with Soviet-Egyptian policy and was known to favor stepped-up military involvement to advance political and ideological ends.⁸¹

But probably Moscow's basic reason not only for renewed arms shipments to Egypt but also for its likely last minute approval of Egyptian-Syrian war plans for October 1973 was that, short of direct intervention, it could not turn President Sadat

⁸⁰ IISS, Military Balance 1973-1974 (London, 1973), p. 82.

⁸¹ For more on this subject see Malcolm Mackintosh, "The Soviet Military: Influence on Foreign Policy," Problems of Communism, Vol. XXII (Sept.-Oct. 1973), 1-12; and Jon Kinche, "Fall, 1973: The Soviet-Arab Scenario," Midstream, XIX, No. 10 (Dec. 1973), 9-22.

from his objective of war. With this decided, Soviet leaders moved to protect their investment and policy goals in the Middle East by providing support. From about April/May 1973 the Egyptians received Soviet arms on a fairly regular basis, including the latest in bridging equipment, SAMs, tanks, and anti-tank missiles. Relations were proper, if not friendly. Moscow hoped ultimately to transform support into influence, and to use this influence to advance broader, more long range, interests.

And so, in spite of temporary rapprochements since late 1970, at the start of the October War Soviet-Egyptian relations were not stable. Cairo saw Soviet intransigence as the culprit: Moscow was the indecisive factor in an Arab bid to regain prestige and territory. True, the Soviets were supplying arms, but with the arms came the admonishment not to upset the status quo by military action. As for the Kremlin, it did not really trust Sadat to comply with its wishes, yet, on balance, there was no sound reason to sever relations. Quite the opposite. Although Egypt wasn't the leader it had been in Nasser's heyday, it was still the predominant Arab power and its opposition to Soviet policies in the Middle East could well mean failure of those policies.

The October War

Since becoming President, Sadat had found himself in a political stalemate vis à vis the Israelis that he was not able to break. Egypt's economy was stagnant, the society was demoralized under the "no war, no peace" concept, and Sadat

was busy just trying to keep his government viable.⁸² As previously stated, he became convinced, with encouragement from military leaders, that he had to do something to rekindle the spirit of Egyptians and to force a new look at the Arab-Israeli question. On October 6, 1973, Egyptian troops launched an extremely successful attack on Israeli positions in the Sinai while at the same time the Syrians went into battle on the Golan front.

There is no doubt that Moscow had advance notice of the coordinated Arab offensive against Israel.⁸³ The question is, did the Kremlin approve? It would seem as though the answer is yes, but a reluctant yes and with some misgiving. There was much to lose, not only would détente be jeopardized; relations with friendly Arab states might suffer if their war demands were not met, much sophisticated military material could be lost, there was the real possibility of a superpower confrontation, and another loss by Arab armies could do much harm to Soviet prestige around the world. The problem was that there was really no way Egypt could be stopped, short of direct Soviet intervention and Moscow was unwilling to take such a drastic step.

⁸²For example, see P. J. Vatikiotis, "Egypt Adrift: A Study in Disillusion," New Middle East, No. 54 (March, 1973), pp. 5-11.

⁸³The Soviets evacuated suddenly, and en masse, most dependents and non-essential persons from Cairo and Damascus on 3 and 4 October. Also, see IISS, "The Middle East War," Strategic Survey 1973 (London, 1974), pp. 27-28.

The Soviet Union's response to the October War can best be described as flexible. The Kremlin did not proclaim a general line and stick to it, as one might say the United States did by calling for an immediate separation of antagonists together with cease-fire talks, but rather it adjusted its policy line over time. This can be summed up as follows:

(1) Initially Moscow was opposed to a renewed war but when it was apparent that Sadat and Syrian President Asad were committed to action it gave grudging approval and even accelerated arms supplies.

(2) Immediately after the war began, Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov spoke to Sadat about the feasibility of a cease-fire, indicating Moscow's concern about the consequences of continued hostilities.⁸⁴

(3) On 9 October, sensing that the USSR could exploit the Arab's initial military advantage, Brezhnev sent a letter to President Boumedienne of Algeria suggesting that Algeria support Egypt and Syria by all means available⁸⁵--in effect Brezhnev was encouraging a widening in the scope of the war.

⁸⁴New York Times, April 18, 1974, pp. 1, 19.

⁸⁵IISS, Strategic Survey 1973, p. 28.

(4) The letter was followed on 10 October by the start of an extensive arms airlift to Egypt and Syria (and to a lesser extent, Iraq).⁸⁶

(5) After talks in Moscow with Boumedienne on 14-15 October, the Soviet Union affirmed its "determination to promote in every way the liberation of all Arab territories occupied by Israel."⁸⁷ This statement was decidedly different from the first official Soviet government communiqué (7 October) dealing with the war which simply maintained that the Soviet Union was a "reliable friend of the Arab states."⁸⁸

(6) With a shift in the situation on the battlefront, so there was a swing in Soviet outlook. Premier Kosygin arrived in Cairo on 16 October, and after two days probably convinced Sadat to accept a cease-fire. This is presumed because one day after Kosygin returned to the USSR Kissinger was asked to come to Moscow and a cease-fire plan was then quickly agreed to.

⁸⁶ According to General Carlton, Commander of Military Airlift Command, the USSR made a total of 930 flights delivering 15,000 tons of war material to the Arabs. The United States airlifted 22,400 tons to Israel. Armed Forces Journal International, 111, No. 12 (Aug. 1974), p. 8.

⁸⁷ Pravda and Izvestia, October 16, 1973.

⁸⁸ Pravda, October 8, 1973.

These tactical shifts did not detract from the fact that Moscow did indeed give full support, short of directly involving its own combat forces, to the Arab states.⁸⁹

Postwar Developments

The USSR was undoubtedly hoping to markedly improve its standing with Cairo as a result of the lifesaving support it rendered the Arab states during October. There was no doubt that the Arab armed forces could not have sustained a war as long as they did without massive Soviet military aid. Admiral Moorer testified to Congress as Chairman of the JCS that the cost of Soviet arms delivered to Egypt and Syria during the war amounted to about \$2.6 billion.⁹⁰ The Kremlin was dismayed, if not angered, to see Sadat expand ties with the United States almost immediately following the war. Diplomatic relations with Washington were restored, business arrangements were consummated with American firms, and Cairo encouraged an influx of Western aid by guaranteeing that money invested in Egypt would not be expropriated. One Russian commentator, writing in Izvestia, bluntly warned Cairo that infusion of American capital "may in time, as the experience of history

⁸⁹ The so-called superpower confrontation of 25-26 October can be viewed from the Soviet-Arab vantage point as diplomatic and implied military support. The Soviet note of 25 October to the Israeli government stating that the continuation of Israeli aggression "will entail very serious consequences," can be similarly viewed.

⁹⁰ Wall Street Journal, February 27, 1974, p. 1

teaches, turn into a bitter hangover for Egypt, and especially for its people."⁹¹

But what disturbed Soviet leaders most was Sadat's willingness to utilize Secretary of State Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy," that excluded participation by the Soviet Union, to effect substantive decisions in Middle East affairs. When Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmi hurriedly went to Moscow following the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement of January 18, 1974, to detail what had transpired, Moscow emphasized the need for its inclusion into any further deliberations. Pravda reported:

It was stressed [during Fahmi's talks with Soviet leaders] that an important factor in the struggle for a just settlement in the Near East is the close coordination of the actions of the Soviet Union and Egypt at all stages, including in the work of the Near East peace conference and in all the working groups that could come out of it.⁹²

The Kremlin was not going to be left out of any "peace conferences" or "working groups" that would make policy affecting its interests in the region. And yet, this was precisely what was happening in early 1974. Cairo's acceptance of Kissinger's diplomacy was in fact isolating Moscow from the very region, and the very decision making processes, that it needed to be involved in to protect and advance its own strategems.

⁹¹L. Tolkunov, "The Near East: Two Tendancies," Izvestia, July 25, 1974.

⁹²Pravda, January 25, 1974.

With this in mind, Andrey Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister and Politburo member, was dispatched to Cairo and Damascus in March 1974 on an important and delicate mission: to assess the attitudes of the Arab leaders, to discover where the Soviet Union stood with respect to recent United States diplomatic initiatives, and to offer Moscow's view of the postwar situation. The mood of the Kremlin and how it perceived its relations with Egypt can best be seen by examining the Soviet press and noting the differences between Gromyko's Syrian visit and his Egyptian visit.⁹³

Pravda reported that the Soviet-Syrian talks were held in a "warm, comradely atmosphere" but that the Soviet-Egyptian meetings concentrated on problems between the two sides and took place in a "businesslike atmosphere"--a euphemism indicating severe disagreement. Furthermore, there were no complimentary Soviet press reports devoted to Gromyko's talks with Foreign Minister Fahmi, as there were for the Gromyko-Khaddam (Syrian Foreign Minister) talks. In the final communiqué of 8 March devoted to the Soviet-Syrian meetings, it was noted that: (1) the Soviets would strengthen Syria's defense capability; (2) the Soviets recognized Syria's "inalienable right to use all effective means to liberate its occupied lands"; (3) Damascus recognized the vital importance of Soviet support in all fields and emphasized the need for its

⁹³Coverage of the Gromyko trip in Pravda, March 1, 6 and 8, 1974; and Izvestia, March 8, 1974.

continuation; and (4) a protocol on a comprehensive, long term program for the development of the Syrian oil industry had been signed. Significantly, there were no such pronouncements in the joint communiqué describing the Soviet-Egyptian meetings, only some relatively mild pleasantries were exchanged.

Clearly the Soviets were signalling their sentiments, and, between Egypt and Syria, their immediate policy priorities. Although Soviet policy toward Syria is not the subject of this study, it is necessary to note that Moscow now seemed to reorient the thrust of its Middle East foreign policy interests from Egypt to Syria (this was also true when the Soviets left Egypt in July 1972; they endeavored to cement closer ties with Syria to ensure themselves a voice in Arab affairs). No doubt Sadat and his advisers understood well what was happening; however, they made no attempt to reverse the Soviet moves, quite the contrary. In April, just one month after Gromyko had been in Cairo on his abortive mission of "goodwill," the Kremlin stopped its arms shipments to Egypt. It was probably no coincidence that it was then that Sadat publicly announced that Egypt would end 18 years of reliance on Soviet arms because Moscow had used the supply of weapons as an "instrument of policy leverage to influence Egyptian actions."⁹⁴

The Kremlin was using its control over the flow of military aid as a means to persuade Cairo that the Soviet Union

⁹⁴New York Times, April 19, 1974, pp. 1, 5.

must not, and could not, be isolated from Middle East affairs. The use of military aid as a "persuader" was not new--this Soviet tactic had last been used against Egypt, as we saw, after Sadat's July 1972 expulsion order.

The Soviets halted the flow of arms to Egypt in April 1974, concurrently, they sent Syria an enormous amount of military aid--totaling some \$2 billion--which by October of that year included the swing-wing MIG-23 that Sadat had repeatedly asked for but never received.⁹⁵ One reason for Syria's favored treatment was that the Kremlin hoped it could bring indirect pressure to bear on Egypt (through Syria) to toe the Soviet policy line. Also, because of increased influence with Damascus, Kremlin leaders were able to use Syria as a temporary counterweight to Egypt, thus curbing a singular United States diplomatic offensive in the region--and effectively slowing the pace at which steps were being taken to provide for a further Egyptian-Israeli settlement.

Soviet-Egyptian relations remained severely strained throughout 1974, and yet, both sides kept the door to reconciliation purposely ajar: pleasant notes stressing mutual friendship were exchanged in May on the third anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship,⁹⁶ Podgorny stopped at Aswan in August

⁹⁵ Wall Street Journal, November 21, 1974, p. 1; and Newsweek, November 25, 1974, p. 45.

⁹⁶ Text of notes in Pravda, May 31, 1974.

on his way home from Somalia for "friendly" talks, and a Soviet delegation (though low ranking) was present for opening ceremonies of the Helwan Steel plant, itself built with Soviet economic aid. In October Foreign Minister Fahmi went to Moscow, the first visit by a high ranking Egyptian official in 1974, and there were signs that a rapprochement was in the offing.⁹⁷ This view was subsequently bolstered by the announcement that Brezhnev would visit Cairo, but then suffered a setback when it was learned in late December that the Communist Party leader's trip had been cancelled. Instead, after some delay, it was decided that Gromyko would visit Cairo in February 1975 to continue Soviet-Egyptian meetings on a somewhat less conspicuous level.

Underlying these diplomatic maneuvers, and what must be recognized, was that at the close of 1974 Moscow and Cairo were moving hesitantly toward renewing closer ties (and it appears that as of this writing, March 1975, they will effect such ties). There were sound reasons for this. From the Soviets' viewpoint, they were faced with a familiar and recurring problem: without Egyptian support their overall Middle East policy was sorely handicapped. This was because Egyptian successes in the October War greatly strengthened Sadat's position within Egypt as well as his leadership position in the Arab world. Cairo emerged from the conflict with an expanded

⁹⁷ See Middle East Intelligence Survey, No. 15 (Nov. 1, 1974), pp. 116-17; Pravda, October 16, 1974; and Izvestia, October 17, 1974.

base of support--good relations were established with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and most of the Persian Gulf shaykhdoms. In short, Egypt's ascendant position in Arab affairs convinced Kremlin leaders (once again) that they must not break with Cairo, rather, they must work toward reconciliation and endeavor to re-establish some measurable influence with the Egyptian regime.

From the Egyptian viewpoint, the primary reason for moving toward rapprochement was, and still is, a continuing need for Soviet weapons and spare parts. Even if Sadat was serious about ending his dependence on Soviet weaponry, the process of replacement and particularly retraining could conceivably require several years--given he could find the sellers and the money. With no settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and with tensions still high, Egypt's political-military leaders would not allow the country's military strength to decline. These leaders also recognized that Egypt could not have achieved its regional prominence without relatively strong armed forces; and that the readiness and potency of their Soviet equipped armed forces had become a function of Moscow's willingness to maintain a flow of spare parts, sophisticated weapons, and technical expertise. It was axiomatic that Egypt must be kept militarily strong. Therefore, by the end of 1974 Egyptian leaders felt a very real need for Soviet military aid. They reasoned that if a marked improvement in relations with the Soviet Union was required to

maintain military prowess, then Egypt must move in that direction.

It was stated in the Introduction that oil had become an inseparable aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and therefore it had assumed a unique role in Soviet-Egyptian, and more broadly speaking, in Soviet-Middle East relations. Egypt is a member of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (See Footnote 3 for member states) and while it is not a major oil producer, as the dominant Arab power in the region it is an important member. As such, it has a say in OAPEC oil policies, especially as they relate to the Arab-Israeli question. Although the Soviets cannot now control the pricing of Arab oil, the regulation of its flow, or the determination of markets, some marked influence on these factors would give the Soviets potent leverage in world affairs. Obviously, influence with Cairo could well help Moscow achieve such aspirations.

The Soviet Union did strongly encourage the Arab States during, and following, the 1973 October War to use oil as a politico-economic weapon to force concessions from the West (and Japan) and to isolate Israel on the international scene.⁹⁸ Of course, Moscow stood to benefit from a selective oil embargo policy--though the Soviets always couched their encouragement of the "oil weapon" in terms of what it could do

⁹⁸For example, see Pravda, November 9 and December 5, 1973; and Izvestia, October 19, November 14 and December 30, 1973.

for its "Arab friends." Moscow wanted to see NATO split and rendered ineffective, a longstanding aim; it wanted to heighten the "contradictions" between the United States and the Third World; and it wanted to "prove" the weakness of the capitalist system. These aims were meant to be furthered through careful manipulation of the oil weapon. How much influence Moscow actually had in Egypt with respect to oil policies remains unknown; however, considering the amount of arms being delivered during the October War, Soviet suggestions were at least seriously considered, if not actually implemented.

Another aspect of Soviet interest in Middle East oil is a growing need for that commodity throughout Russia which cannot readily be met by domestic production. The Petroleum Press Service has indicated a probable 1980 Soviet oil deficit on the order of 100 million tons per year,⁹⁹ and the Economist has estimated the shortfall of that year to range from 50 to 100 million tons.¹⁰⁰ The Soviets could make up this difference from their own resources, but the exploitation of Siberian oil is exceedingly costly because of climatic conditions and topographical hindrances. Cost per barrel of Siberian oil is estimated to be three to four times the cost of a like amount of Middle East oil (at 1974 prices). If

⁹⁹The Petroleum Press Service, January 1973, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰Economist, July 10, 1971, p. 90.

Moscow had substantial political influence in Arab states, it would probably encourage nationalization of oil companies, as it did with the Iraq Petroleum Company in 1972, and diversion of oil from Western markets to the USSR and its satellites.

VI. CONCLUSION

Soviet policy in Egypt, and generally in the Middle East, stems from a combination of a fluid communist ideology and a conscious attitude of Realpolitik within the Kremlin. The Soviet Union does not desire additional real estate in the region, rather it strives to obtain political and psychological influence so as to advance its national and international policies. As it was, pragmatic raisons d'etat transcended ideological considerations in the 1950s. Moscow capitalized on two events to penetrate the Middle East and move toward a position of paramountcy in Egyptian affairs: the formation of the Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Soviet leaders entered into a friendly state-to-state relationship with Cairo without attempting to subvert the masses through an indigenous communist party. Then, as today, communism and the class struggle were relegated to a position of secondary importance. As one Soviet commentator wrote:

It would be the worst example of blind dogmatism and the greatest strategic error in the struggle for the socialist transformation of the world to reject the revolutionary democrats because their views are at variance with Marxism.¹⁰¹

Ideology, while subordinate to power dictates, nevertheless enters into Soviet considerations and cannot be

¹⁰¹ R. Andreessyan, "Revolutionary Democrats of Asia and Africa," Aziya i Afrika sezodnya, No. 10 (1966).

ignored. After all, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union governs and controls the USSR--and within the CPSU are the country's leaders whose claims to authority are founded, and legitimized, by Marxist-Leninist doctrine. And so, everytime an Arab country becomes "progressive," everytime trade agreements and cultural pacts are consummated between the Soviet Union and Middle East countries, and everytime there is an exchange of dignitaries ending with a communique expressing "friendly solidarity," Soviet leaders vindicate their system to themselves and their critics. Accused of apostasy by Communist China, the Kremlin can refer with some pride and sense of accomplishment to its gains in the Middle East.

The impact of Soviet nonmilitary trade and aid on Egyptian policies, while sometimes over-rated, is of consequence. It is estimated that some one million Egyptians would be out of work if the Soviets cancelled existing trade agreements with Cairo. Moscow extends loans with low interest rates, usually two or two and one-half percent, and accepts Egyptian goods for payment, although now that oil rich Arab countries are backing Sadat, Moscow is showing a preference for hard currency. The volume of trade between the two grew steadily from 1955 to 1974, and during those years Egypt headed the list of Third World countries trading with the Soviet Union.

However, of paramount importance to the Soviet-Egyptian linkage is their military marriage. Once Moscow was established as the sole arms distributor of Egypt, it was

relatively easy to introduce a degree of dependence into the relationship. The requirement for arms remains today Moscow's principal tool for influence in Egypt. It is necessary for one to keep in mind that the existence of a strong military has been, since Nasser's day, a sine qua non among Cairo's political-military leaders. Nothing could be allowed to cripple the strength of the armed forces as they, above all else, were the power base for Egypt's rulers and enabled the country to be a leader in the Arab world.

Of all the military aid the Soviet Union extended to Third World countries from 1955 to 1973, Egypt, the largest single recipient by far, received a full 40 percent.¹⁰² For the same time period, the next single country on the list was India, receiving some 15 percent. Military aid to Cairo in 1973 amounted to some \$600 million and while there was a drastic cutback in 1974, because of Moscow's displeasure with Cairo's independent postwar policies, the Kremlin has maintained a willingness to renew large-scale arms sales and shipments.¹⁰³ Indeed, following Foreign Minister Gromyko's

¹⁰²Gur Ofer, "The Economic Burden of the Soviet Involvement in the Middle East," Soviet Studies XXIV, No. 3 (Jan. 1973), p. 329; and U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973 (State Department, Washington, D.C., 1974), pp. 31, 70, 89.

¹⁰³Figures released by the State Department put the amount of military aid received by Egypt in 1973 closer to \$500 than \$600 million. See, World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973, p. 89.

fence mending mission to Cairo in February 1975, the Soviets resumed shipment of advanced weapons to Egypt by delivering six MIG 23 fighters, the aircraft that Sadat had long sought.

There is no doubt but that the Soviets have a substantial quantitative military and economic investment, and an implicit political stake, in Egypt. Soviet policy aims aside, this amounts to a sizable investment in prestige. A defeat of Egyptian forces in battle, a reversal by Cairo of its socialistic programs, or an official denouncement of Soviet-Egyptian friendship would constitute a psychological blow to the Kremlin as well as a very real setback to Soviet foreign policy objectives. The Russians would like to maintain a formidable Egypt that owes enough allegiance to them to ensure obligation of Cairo's support in their international dealings. This would include siding with them in their ideological dispute with China, providing support for Soviet declarations in international forums, helping to eliminate the Western presence in the Middle East, and use of Egypt as a base for extended military and political operations.

The Arab-Israeli conflict affords the Soviets a built-in mechanism which they can use to enhance their position in Egypt while endeavoring to establish a more communistically oriented Arab Socialist Union and government. For now, Moscow needs the constant tension that the Arab-Israeli strife produces to protect its investment in Egypt, although it would like to be able to control this tension. If Arabs and Jews could settle the conflict to the satisfaction

of both parties, there are strong indications that Egypt would not align itself with the USSR. Events such as Egypt's response to the attempted communist led coup in the Sudan in July 1971, the July 1972 Soviet expulsion from Egypt, and Cairo's post October War policies (i.e. antagonistic toward Moscow) all sustain that observation.

Also, because Islam is a potent counterforce to communism and religious beliefs are a part of the cultural tradition rooted in Arab life, the Soviets will most probably have to settle for a rather formal, government-to-government type relationship with Egypt (and other Arab countries). While this has not curtailed Soviet aims in the area--Moscow has not demanded ideological conformity--it has proved to be a major stumbling block in Arab-Soviet relations which the Kremlin will find difficult, if not impossible, to circumvent.

Soviet investment in Egypt has paid dividends: Egyptian and Arab support in international forums, the use of Egypt as a strategic transit point to India and Africa, and endorsement of Soviet legitimacy in the Middle East are benefits already obtained. In addition, the Soviets continue to try to benefit from and influence Arab oil policies; the backing of Egypt in this cause would prove most helpful. In the near future the Soviet Navy will make use of Egyptian ports and an opened Suez Canal to project a significant military presence in the Persian Gulf area, the Strait of Hormuz being of primary importance.

In sum, one must expect the Soviet Union to continue its support of Egypt so as to establish some measure of genuine long term influence with Cairo. If successful, the Kremlin can advance not only its policies in the Middle East, but also its global interests. The Soviets will not readily relinquish their position in Egypt and the Arab world. From their vantage point, the manifold and important political, economic, and strategic benefits to be gained in the region are too substantial to be lost--whether to an outside power or to the Arabs themselves.

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